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Re: House Bill No. 4703: A bill to designate an official amphibian of this state

Honorable Representatives, I am here representing myself and my husband in support of this bill to designate our Michigan Spring Peeper as the state amphibian.

There are many reasons this is the time to recognize a state amphibian. You have heard of how very many frog species around the world are becoming extinct, so many that scientists and conservation organizations have set up an Amphibian Ark with captive breeding programs in hopes of saving ~~the~~ those most threatened. To call attention to the issues globally, they have declared 2008 the Year of the Frog. Michigan participates through our Detroit Zoo that has one of the most outstanding amphibian exhibit and research facilities in the world.

For 12 years we have participated in the Michigan Frog Survey listening at 10 sites on a route and reporting the dates when we hear a species calling. The Peeper is always one of the earliest and loudest and recognized voices, and this has been an exciting and every-changing adventure for us.

Recognition of an amphibian is also a means of calling attention to the environmental conditions in our state, the quality of our waterways and our beautiful natural lands. Because the peeper occurs over almost all of Michigan it is a very appropriate choice. The question comes up if other states recognize amphibians. I looked this up and found that 16 states and Puerto Rico have state amphibians, eleven recognize a frog and 6 a salamander. I believe we would be the first state to make the Spring Peeper our state amphibian.

The little vernal ponds throughout our state are home to the Spring Peeper. It is a tiny miracle of a frog only an inch to an inch and half long. It survives the harsh cold and ice of winter, even at times freezing solid. A few weeks from now, usually late March, some little ponds will thaw and the chorus of peepers will begin. We don't want to ever lose this. Most everyone has heard this little frog. Very few have of actually seen it.

Frogs and peepers appear in art and literature and folklore. One book I have is a classic, The Frog Book by Mary Dickerson, 1906. She was a herpetologist and also editor of Natural History magazine. For all of you who may have heard the peeper and then walked up to the pond to see this creature making so much noise and found that your approach has caused complete silence, and that look as you will, you can't find a frog, I give you this description.

This experienced naturalist described in a few pages trying three times over a few weeks to see a peeper without success.

"In two weeks we go again. It is afternoon, and the temperature is at 65 F. The pussy-willows are no longer grey; they have developed into spikes of golden or green flowers, and are surrounded by early bees and flies. The sound of a chorus reaches us before we leave the car, although the marsh is more than a quarter of a mile distant. The combination of sounds is almost ear-splitting. The largest company seems to be in the connected pools about the roots of a tangle of grey birches and swamp-maples. It is easy to penetrate here. We step from tree root to tree root or from log to log over shallow pools of black water filled with brown leaves, grasses and sticks. A slow painted-turtle walks through the shallow water, now in the shadow a black movement only, now showing distinctly as it come into a spot of sunlight. But where are the frogs? The voices are all about us. There is one particularly loud one at our very feet. We look; we scrutinize every leaf and stick and bit of grass. It is maddening that we cannot see the singer. With our slightest movement the sound ceases. And so again and again. We finally retreat, with the Peeper still a mysterious piping voice"

"Here is a boggy piece of land that must be pasture in mid-summer. It stretches into meadow on all sides. There is no difficulty in getting to the very centre of it by stepping from one grass hillock to another. We heard the chorus at a distance of many blocks, and it has continued as we approached; but as we step onto our first hillock it becomes quiet all about us; the quiet spreads, and now the whole bog is silent. We penetrate a little farther and then stand still. After what seems a long time, one Peeper calls far to the right. The call is taken up by frogs nearer and nearer, until we are surrounded by sound. This time our search is rewarded. We see one frog. He is so small, that, instead of its seeming strange that we had not found them before, we think it a mirale that we have discovered one now. He swims vigorously from a clump of grass to a flat twig, which to him is a log, climbs upon it, and is in full view for a moment; then plunges into the water again, and swims to another clump of grass and leaves almost a our feet. Instantly he beings singing, and although he is partially concealed by projecting leaf, we can see his swollen throat gleam like a great white bubble under the level rays of the late afternoon sun. The transparent inflated throat is one-half as large as the frog's head and body together. It does not greatly change size between the calls, but collapses at the end..... We try to capture him, and get only a handful of mud for our pains..... We retreat with the congratulatory remark, "At any rate, we have seen a Peeper!"

This spring I know you will hear a Spring Peeper, and I hope you will have voted to make him the Michigan Amphibian. And good luck in your search.